Allied Whale Research Internships

Allied Whale (AW), the marine mammal research lab of College of the Atlantic and Bar Harbor Whale Watch Co. (BHWW) seek 5 interns/research assistants for the 2019 field season. These are entry-level research positions designed to offer experience for individuals seeking to develop their professional careers in marine mammal research. Two summer positions (mid-May through August 31st) and three full season positions (mid-May through October 31st) are available. *College of the Atlantic students can receive flexibility in start and end dates.

Overview of position: This is a unique internship program in that the selected individuals will have the opportunity to participate and receive training in a wide range of marine mammal research activities while receiving income when working as a crew/scientist aboard commercial whale watching trips operating from Bar Harbor, Maine. Allied Whale currently supports field projects in the trophic ecology of humpback and fin whales, the ongoing housing and maintenance of the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalog and fin whale photo-ID catalog, an active marine mammal stranding response program, and a research/education partnership with Bar Harbor Whale Watch Co. In addition, Allied Whale maintains the facilities on and conducts research from the Mount Desert Rock Marine Research Station situated on a remote offshore island. The interns play a critical role in the success of the field season and serve as support to all aspects of summer activities within both Allied Whale and Bar Harbor Whale Watch Co.

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Description of duties: Upon arrival in May, all interns will receive research, boat crew, and Gulf of Maine natural history training by both Allied Whale and the Bar Harbor Whale Watch Company staff. As the Allied Whale field season does not begin until early June- the first several weeks will be focused on learning whale watch deckhand responsibilities and performing humpback whale photo-ID with the NAHWC in the office or stranding response.

Once the season is in full swing, interns will rotate through shifts working as a Research Assistant/Deckhand (RA) for the Bar Harbor Whale Watch Co., shifts working as dock attendant for the Bar Harbor Whale Watch Co., shifts in the Allied Whale office, and time off. Every week, schedules will be different and weather dependent. A typical week in June-August may include two days scheduled as researchers on Whale Watch vessels, two days scheduled in the AW office, one day scheduled as dock attendant for the BHWW, and two days off. Weather may cause shifts to be canceled and some weeks may be lighter in load or responsibilities. Interns will also rotate through week-long shifts on Mount Desert Rock.

Below are specific expectations for each designated shift:

Whale watch trips: Research responsibilities on the whale watch trips include searching for whales, photo-identification of whales and behavioral data collection. Deckhand responsibilities include line handling, vessel cleaning, helping seasick passengers and passenger safety. RAs are also responsible for assisting the naturalist in promoting education and conservation programs on each trip. Maintaining a positive, professional, friendly and outgoing demeanor while engaging whale watch passengers and fellow crew is compulsory. When whale watch trips cancel for weather, crew may be asked to report for duty to complete maintenance on the vessel.
Dock attendant duties: Dock attendants are critical for the daily smooth operation of boat trips at the BHWW Co. Attendants assist in security screening, loading passengers onto boats, tying boats to docks as trips depart or return, delivering lunches to crew on boats, pumping gas for visiting vessels, and communicating trip schedule changes to the public. These shifts are not dependent on weather.

Allied Whale office shifts: On scheduled office days, interns will be required to be available in the Allied Whale office from 9AM-5PM. During those hours, interns will compare individual whales to the NAHWC catalog, enter their whale watch data into the database, manage the Adopt-a-Whale program, and answer phone calls to the office. Allied Whale’s stranding program is responsible for responding to all dead or stranded marine mammals in northern Maine, primarily seal species. Interns will be on call to assist with field stranding response and to participate in necropsies (animal autopsies). Interns scheduled for office shifts will also be on call for boat research days.

Allied Whale boat research days: When weather permits, interns will assist Allied Whale staff and graduate students on trips offshore to collect biopsy samples of humpback and fin whales. While on board one of the research vessels, interns will be responsible for collecting photo identification images of whales and recording data. Interns will be responsible for processing images from these trips.

Mount Desert Rock: We hope for interns to complete several shifts (each at least a week in length) at our offshore research station Mount Desert Rock. While on the island, interns will participate in land-based whale monitoring from the lighthouse tower, seal counts, gull counts, and maintenance/ construction projects at the station. Interns will collect weekly samples of seal scat to contribute to a collaborative microplastics project. Interns will also receive experience working in a remote off-the-grid location.

Pay/Housing: Those accepted to the program are able to earn income by their work on the Bar Harbor Whale Watch Company. Deckhands are paid $50 per trip (at the height of summer, there are 2 trips running a day) plus considerable tips. Interns also receive a free First Aid Certification and TWIC card from the BHWW Co. Provided housing in downtown Bar Harbor is mandatory for a fee. Rent will be approximately $375 a month for a bed in a shared room. While at Mount Desert Rock, food is provided for free. The BHWW Co. also provides funding for RAs to attend the annual North Atlantic Right Whale Conference in New Bedford, Massachusetts in November.

Qualifications: Applicants should have a college background in biology, ecology, and/or marine sciences. Previous data collection experience in a research setting and knowledge of marine mammals are great advantages. Prior experience offshore and skills in DSLR photography are also assets. Due to Coast Guard requirements, all crew onboard US commercial vessels and therefore all research assistant/interns, must be US citizens or have permanent resident alien status. Also, all interns will be drug screened prior to employment and will be enrolled in a random drug testing program. Applicants should be physically and mentally fit: able to lift and carry 50 pounds, comfortable around dead and decomposing animals, and able to hike up to 5 miles carrying gear for stranding response. Most importantly, applicants must be positive in attitude, flexible to quickly changing schedules, are able to work independently, and be seaworthy/comfortable working on boats. Lastly, because of the community living situation both in Bar Harbor and on Mount Desert Rock, applicants must get along well with others and be able to handle working in a team setting.
To apply: Please send a cover letter detailing your reasons for applying, a resume, and two letters of recommendation to: Dr. Tanya Lubansky (tlubansky@coa.edu). *Letters may be sent either directly from the references or by the applicants.

Please specify which position you are interested in (summer or full-season). Deadline of application is February 22nd.